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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 000654

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [WBG](#) [IS](#) [EG](#) [SA](#) [QA](#)
SUBJECT: PALESTINIAN AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES QATAR'S SUPPORT
OF HAMAS, UNITY GOVERNMENT, AND FATE OF GILAD SHALIT

REF: DOHA 147

Classified By: Ambassador Joseph E. LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b and d).

(C) KEY POINTS

-- Ambassador met October 20 with Palestinian Ambassador Mounir Abdullah Ghanim. Prominent in their discussion were the prospects for a unity government between Hamas and Fatah and the fate of captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit.

-- Ghanim urged the U.S. to restore the credibility of Mahmoud Abbas, saying that his position on the Goldstone Report, along with the trilateral meeting with President Obama and Israeli PM Netanyahu, had damaged him.

-- The Palestinian Ambassador noted that the Palestinian Authority had accepted the Egyptian proposal for a unity government, but that deep divisions developing within Hamas were preventing a final agreement.

-- On Gilad Shalit, he predicted that Hamas would not reach a final deal with Israel on his release until the right opportunity arrives to maximize its credibility among the Palestinian people, probably after Palestinian elections.

(C) COMMENTS

-- Ghanim sees a serious divide among the leaders of Hamas over the issue of reconciliation with Fatah, though he is not yet willing to call it a split. His request to the U.S. to bolster the credibility of Mahmoud Abbas is designed to take advantage of perceived Hamas weakness and disarray.

-- The Palestinian Ambassador's insights into the future of Gilad Shalit are not based on inside information, but on a shrewd understanding of his Hamas rivals. That Hamas will time any release to take maximum advantage of it probably goes without saying.

End Key Points and Comments.

1. (C) Ambassador met October 20 with Palestinian Ambassador Mounir Abdullah Ghanim. The meeting was held at the request of Ambassador Ghanim. The two Ambassadors discussed a wide range of issues that included the prospects for the formation of a unity government between Hamas and Fatah and the divisions within Hamas that the Ambassador Ghanim blamed for the reluctance of its leaders to reach an agreement. Ambassador also raised the issue of captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, and the prospects for his release by his Hamas captors.

2. (C) The Palestinian Ambassador asked the Ambassador to

relay the following message to Washington: "Please help restore the credibility of Mahmoud Abbas." He offered his opinion that in accepting President Obama's invitation to meet with him and Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu, Abbas had weakened himself. He said that the position Abbas took on the Goldstone report had weakened him even further. He observed that this is a very precarious time in the peace process, with divisions manifesting themselves in the Hamas leadership between various actors in Gaza, Damascus, and within the military.

13. (C) Ambassador Ghanim noted that the PA had agreed to the Egyptian proposal for a unity government, but that the divisions within Hamas had prevented it from agreeing. Particularly worrisome is the position of the Hamas militias, which worry that any agreement might result in their absorption by the military. Ghanim quote the leader of the Qassam Brigades, who warned that his force would "eliminate the government" before permitting his militia to be absorbed. Ghanim took that as a threat aimed against the Hamas leadership, should it be inclined to make a deal. The position of the Qassam leadership and their militant allies is "no reconciliation", he said.

14. (C) Ambassador raised the issue of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, and whether the Palestinian Ambassador believed a deal on his release was imminent. Ghanim said that negotiations were underway, but he predicted no final deal until after Palestinian elections. "Hamas has him as a guarantee. They will use him at the right moment, to enhance their own credibility among the people, which is dropping even in Gaza. They will wait for a final bargain,

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even if the elections are delayed," Ghanim said.
LeBaron